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DISCUSSION

THE AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL

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Professor Bolton, in his editorial note in the January number of *THE SCHOOL REVIEW*, brings us face to face with some very grave and at present ugly looking problems. He claims in substance that separate and independent agricultural high schools will mean the sapping of the very life from the present high schools and the gradual introduction of social distinctions whose absence is the glory of American democracy. And he might have added that the separate and independent agricultural high school will mean much added expense due to the duplication of buildings, teachers, and equipment.

But values are relative, and we must always select for marginal utility. The first and to me the most important objection to keeping the schools together crops out in such sentences as this in Professor Bolton's note: "Teachers of the so-called practical subjects are as a rule much less well trained, have a lower professional standard, are more itinerant, less devoted to their work, and less valuable to the schools in the training for character than the other teachers."

Now let us examine that sentence. First there is an implied sneer at the whole matter in the phrase "so-called practical subjects." And so long as we try to keep the two classes of students and teachers together those in the industrial work will be sneered at by those in the literary work who are in the main heading toward the "so-called" learned professions of law, medicine, education, and office-holding. A high-school teacher said to me not long since: "Whenever we have a pupil that can't pass up, we put him into commercial geography just so as to get him through." That voices the attitude and characterizes the atmosphere into which we must plunge the country boy if we are to send him to the town high school to take his course in agriculture. But it does not tell the worst of the story, for no sooner does our honest, hard-working country boy get into the town high school, than he (unconsciously of course) finds himself surrounded by well-dressed and well-mannered girls who have little depth or earnestness of purpose because they are headed toward the leisure class as an ideal life. And he finds the only textbooks approved by the town teachers are texts with nothing in them that heads a boy country-ward. The arithmetics are filled with problems and cases for the middleman, the banker, stock broker, commission merchant, and

even the carpenter and manufacturer, but never a word for the scientific farmer. Probably feed and food tables are the most important thing that the course in agriculture brings the young farmer's mind into contact with. But where do we find a textbook with a case on the food tables, or where do we find a town teacher who can and will appreciate the importance of the subject? Think of the town boys, even if the girls were excused, taking time to get thoroughly familiar with the manurial value of the different kinds of feeding-stuffs. And yet the people of the United States are losing, according to conservative estimates, \$3,000,000 per year because of their ignorance of this one subject alone. The books on geography and composition will compare no better than the books on arithmetic.

I am afraid that the distinctions are here or have got to come, and that the high schools which are nothing more than college preparatory schools will have to sink into relative insignificance compared with the schools which teach the masses how to make a living as well as how to live. According to the last report of the Commissioner of Education there are 17,231,000 pupils in the primary and grammar grades. Dividing this number by eight, we have 2,153,000 for each grade. According to the same report, there are 924,000 in the high schools and academies. Dividing this number by four, we get 231,000 for each grade in the high schools and academies. That is, only about one out of ten of our pupils go to the present high school. What if the school that takes care of the other nine becomes nine times as large and important? There would be nothing out of proportion.

Let us examine the proposition: "The teachers are much less well trained!" Well trained in what? I hesitate to answer but I know and others know that it is less well trained in what the so-called leisure class think most valuable. Is a college graduate who cannot work a problem with the food tables, but who can read a little Latin, better trained than the pupil from a course of equal length in an agriculture where he was not taught to read Latin but to work problems pertaining to the chemistry of the soil and food materials?

There is small doubt but that our greatest national danger is that we will become over-specialized and hence unappreciative of what the other fellow has done or is doing. I fear that Professor Bolton has in mind the specialist when he writes of the well-trained teacher in the high school. But I believe that I voice the thought of our ablest thinkers when I say that the specialist is a dangerous person for a secondary school. What we need is the broad-minded man or woman who can see the connections and the bearings on other things which the topic which he or she teaches has. But the age just past has been an age of manufacturing; the coming age is to be one of agriculture. The millions are to come back from the cities into the freedom and the plenty of the country. We need as never before the many-sided men and women but men and women who will put how to live and how to make a living first, and how to use one's leisure second.

We need the love of beauty and harmony that comes from the contact with Greek thought as revealed in Greek art and literature; we need the love of order, system, and obedience to law and duty that comes with a long and close contact with the Romans; we need a thirst for knowledge and all that, but these things make for morals with the receptive minds. The active, executive, restless minds, however, will not stay under such discipline, and hence this class which composes more than half of the population is not reached by our present ladylike high-school teachers. Athletics and industry make powerfully for morals, but not in the same way or with the same class as the literary branches. We need both, but we shall have difficulty in keeping them together.